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The CIA: Diplomacy Has Been Part of the Action

By John Horton*This is the first of two articles.*

HOLLYWOOD, Maryland — The timing of Secretary of State George Shultz could not have been worse last month when he appeared at the Senate the day after Seymour M. Hersh revealed in *The New York Times* that Washington had given information on the African National Congress to the South African government. Mr. Shultz told the senators he had talked to CIA Director William Casey, who had flatly denied the allegation. There the matter rests.

The story stirred up questions about U.S. intelligence ties with other governments. There are such ties, but a former CIA operations officer may refer to them only generally. A government that may be happy to deal with the CIA might prefer that the link not be raised publicly.

Every liaison between the CIA and a foreign intelligence or security service is different. The link is usually consistent with the formal relations between the United States and the other government. The CIA does not invent alliances.

A liaison in intelligence may follow diplomatic relations. Or it may not. Normal pro forma diplomatic relations or a desire for commerce are conventional motives for an exchange of embassies. There may be no such common interest for an exchange in the intelligence field.

Thus, national policy defines the role of the CIA. The Alliance for Progress in Latin America in the 1960s illustrated this.

One aim of the Alliance was to hamper Cuban subversion. Some Latin countries were pretty sleepy about security. (But not all. Beware the sweeping generalization about Latin America.)

In some countries the police served the narrow interests of those in power, smelling out domestic opposition to the in-group and stumbling right past the Cuban and Soviet intelligence operations going on under their noses.

To a certain turn of practical mind, arrest and torture are convenient ways of dealing with the opposition. The measures appear effective in the short term. Perpetrators do not seem to realize that brutality is, at best, politically unattractive.

The CIA was told to try to change this face of the police just as a public safety program of the U.S. Agency for International Development was being set up to train police forces in other disciplines. Persuading police officials to collect information within a framework of civil rights, leading them to concentrate on real enemies of constitutional government rather than on the political outs — that was the approach.

This was no mere technical mission but rather one of diplomacy. To be effective, the CIA could not blow into town and deliver the canned U.S. sermon on human rights. If it did not want the door to police headquarters slammed on its foot, it had to tactfully lead the duller officers to tolerate new ways. The brighter ones were eager to build a force to be proud of, even if it meant putting up with a degree of foreign meddling.

Often the advice was least heeded where most needed. But it is hard to generalize. In many

countries, the CIA, as did the AID program, left behind enduring good will that developed from working together on common tasks. Working closely but quietly with these governments to modify bad practices was probably as effective as putting them in a public pillory for violating human rights; some would say more so.

(The charge that the CIA was mixed up with torture in Latin America is peculiarly galling to CIA veterans. There was a certain grim amusement to be found in the notion that Latin policemen needed advice on techniques of torture.)

Weak career bureaucracies are a worldwide problem, not only in Latin America. The police suffer as much as any other government service if a new crop of political hacks moves in on professional levels with every change of regime. The ban on training of police forces — a shortsighted residue of the birth of wrongheaded righteousness in Washington in the mid-1970s — was a blow to this continuity of experience.

Purists within the CIA have objected to the CIA's involvement in such "country-building activities" — a term they use derisively for this expensive diversion of CIA talent. The CIA should stick to the serious work of espionage and counterespionage, purists say. No one else is capable of these highly specialized tasks. Why should the CIA do the State Department's work?

The writer was a CIA operations officer from 1948 to 1975, and the intelligence officer for Latin America on the National Intelligence Council in 1983 and 1984. He contributed this to the Los Angeles Times.